

SUMMARY OF THE TRANSITION COMMITTEE MEETING JANUARY 12, 1999

The Transition Committee of the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) met on Tuesday, January 12, 1999, at 1:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST) as part of the Fourth NELAC Interim Meeting in Bethesda, MD. The meeting was led by its chair, Dr. Charles D. Brokopp of the Utah Department of Health. A list of action items is given in Attachment A. A list of participants is given in Attachment B. A copy of a survey of environmental laboratories is given in Appendix C. *The purpose of the meeting was to address issues included on the committee's agenda and to open the floor for questions from the attendees.*

INTRODUCTION OF THE COMMITTEE AND SUPPORT STAFF

Dr. Brokopp introduced himself, then asked each committee member to do the same and to describe his or her previous and current involvement with NELAC. He thanked the committee members for their hard work on difficult issues over the past year.

REVIEW OF THE COMMITTEE AGENDA

Dr. Brokopp reviewed the specific agenda items to be addressed in the meeting and details relating to discussion on each are described below.

PROGRESS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE COMMITTEE

Dr. Brokopp described the accomplishments of the committee's work over the last half year, including developing two roundtables to be held at NELAC IVi, preparing a revised timetable for approval of accrediting authorities, and circulating several planning surveys.

UPDATE STATUS OF ACCREDITING AUTHORITY REVIEWS

Ms. Jeanne Mourrain provided an update on the status of the review of each of the 17 accrediting authorities applying in the first group of states. She identified those states for which the completeness reviews have been finished, and those that have completed technical reviews and/or on-site assessments. As a result of successful completion of the entire review process, Ms. Mourrain noted that she has received a recommendation from the assessors that the State of New York be recognized as a NELAC accrediting authority. Ms. Mourrain speculated that no more than 12 or 13 of the states among the original 17 will be included in the announced first group of accrediting authorities. She also summarized the discussions from a roundtable held on Monday, January 11, 1999 at NELAC IVi. The meeting was attended by representatives of the 17 states applying to be accrediting authorities, the U.S. EPA regional lead assessors, and NELAP observers. At the request of Dr. Eldert Hartwig, Ms. Mourrain reviewed, step-by-step, the entire review and approval process for states applying to be accrediting authorities.

TIMELINE FOR LABORATORY ACCREDITATION

Ms. Mourrain reviewed the tentative timeline for approval of accrediting authorities and the eventual recognition of NELAC-accredited laboratories. The assessment and approval process for the first group of accrediting authorities has been more time-consuming than originally anticipated and the timeline continues to slip from those proposed earlier. The timeline proposes that accrediting authority assessments of approximately one-half of the laboratories will begin in June 1999, with announcement of the first group of accredited laboratories in April 2000. The remainder of the laboratory on-site assessments, and eventual announcement of additional accredited laboratories, will be made between April 2000 and March 2001.

A concern was raised by an attendee regarding the possible negative implications of a laboratory that has been assigned an "interim accredited status." Attendees were assured that all laboratories will be accredited or not accredited and that "interim status" will simply refer to those laboratories that have not undergone an on-site assessment, and that a laboratory identified as accredited will realize no competitive advantage over an accredited laboratory with interim status. To a question concerning an accredited laboratory with interim status, attendees were assured that a laboratory given interim status by its primary accrediting authority would also automatically be recognized by any secondary accrediting authority(ies).

To a concern about the variability among laboratory application forms among states desiring to serve as secondary accrediting authorities, it was agreed that there may be some benefit in the Transition Committee developing some basic form guidelines, with the hope that each secondary accrediting authority state will pattern its own application form as closely as possible to it.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS FROM PLANNING SURVEYS

Mr. Jerry Parr reviewed the content and intended goal of several distributed planning surveys and any results acquired to date from those surveys. The first survey was designed for distribution to laboratories that may intend to apply to an accrediting authority. This survey was sent to several laboratory accreditation organizations, trade associations, etc. for wider advertisement and dispersal. The goal of this survey is to develop an approximate number of laboratories that will eventually seek NELAC recognition, and to give the committee some idea as to whether the number of states eventually approved as accrediting authorities will be able to handle accreditation of the laboratories. An attendee indicated that it would be useful if this survey was included on the NELAC Website.

Another survey was sent to all of the states that have not applied to be accrediting authorities. Specific questions were designed to gauge how many states desired to become accrediting authorities in 1999 and how many laboratories in a particular state might be seeking recognition from another state that would be an accrediting authority. Attendees from several states that have not applied to be accrediting authorities were asked the reasons why they have not done so.

A survey was also sent to the 17 states in the initial accrediting authority group. Each state was asked how many laboratories it currently accredits in-state and out-of-state. About 3,300 in-state and 1,200 out-of-state laboratories are currently accredited by these 17 states. Each state was

also asked how many in-state and out-of-state laboratories it thought might seek primary accrediting authority from it. Dr. Brokopp reported that approximately 2,600 laboratories will seek primary accreditation from their home states and approximately 450 will seek primary accreditation from a state other than their own. About one-half of the states reported that they intend to provide primary accreditation to out-of-state laboratories. Many of the states that indicated they would provide this accreditation reported that they could only do so for a small number of laboratories (50 or less). On the matter of scope of accreditation, 15 of the 17 states reported that they would accredit in-state laboratories for the Safe Drinking Water Act but only 11 would accredit out-of-state laboratories for the same. For the Clean Air Act, only 5 will accredit in-state laboratories and only 2 would accredit out-of-state laboratories. The responding states indicated they have approximately 75 on-site assessors among them and that most would benefit from some form of assessor training. Only 2 states indicated that they might need third-party assessor assistance. Approximately one-half of the responding states indicated that they would have a two-tiered (NELAP and non-NELAP) accreditation system.

CLARIFICATION OF ISSUES AND RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

Dr. Carol Batterton led a discussion on questions that have been submitted to the committee on earlier occasions. The only question discussed related to the effective date of standards. Effective with NELAC V, for standards adopted in any June, it is proposed that they become effective the following January. In the case of standards with substantial changes, it is recommended that some other, specific effective date be included for implementation. Laboratories that apply between April and June 1999 will be accredited to the standards in effect at the time that the accrediting authority applied to be an accrediting authority. Laboratory representatives in attendance expressed great dissatisfaction with the 1997 Standards and would prefer to be accredited to the latest version of the standards (e.g., 1998 Standards). Mr. John Anderson said that, even though June standards might be effective the following January, some states might require even longer to get the revised standards through their regulatory process. A question was raised as to whether the two years a state has to modify its regulations to reflect a change in the standards begins with the July approval date or the following January effective date. While the current (1998) Standards do not include the concept of "effective date," it was agreed that this question may need to be forwarded to the Program Policy and Structure Committee for their consideration. Ms. Mourrain sought, and received some support for, a meeting of this committee and the 17 accrediting authorities to see if they are interested in accrediting to the 1998 Standards. Mr. Anderson implored that all accrediting authorities recognize the accreditations of all other accrediting authorities, regardless of the version of Standards being used for the accreditation.

Ms. Batterton stated that many of the other questions addressed by the committee have been answered in the committee's review of its various surveys. It was suggested that these questions (and committee responses), as well as other questions and answers, be made available through the NELAC Website or as an attachment to these minutes.

**ACTION ITEMS
TRANSITION COMMITTEE MEETING
JANUARY 12, 1999**

Item No.	Action	Date to be Completed
1.	Consider developing some basic guidelines for design of a secondary accrediting authority laboratory application form, in the hope that each secondary accrediting authority would pattern its own application form as closely as possible to it.	
2.	Make available via the NELAC Website all information acquired to date from distributed planning surveys.	
3.	Forward to the Program Policy and Structure Committee concern about whether the two-year implementation grace period begins at the time of approval of the Standards (July) or the effective date (the following January).	
4.	Determine which version of the Standards that each accrediting authority should use to accredit its laboratories.	
5.	Make available via the NELAC Website all questions previously submitted to the committee and the committee's formulated responses.	

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TRANSITION COMMITTEE MEETING
JANUARY 12, 1999**

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INFORMAL SURVEY OF ENVIRONMENTAL LABORATORIES 1998-1999

Environmental laboratories will have an opportunity to become a NELAP accredited laboratory during 1999. This voluntary survey seeks to obtain information that will assist with the implementation of NELAP during 1999 and beyond.

Name of Laboratory: _____
 Address _____
 Contact: _____ Phone: (____) _____
 E-mail: _____

1. Does this laboratory intend to seek NELAP accreditation during 1999 or 2000?
 Yes _____ No _____ Not Sure _____

If yes, in which of the following areas:

SDWA CWA RCRA CAA CERCLA

2. What state accreditation programs currently inspect this laboratory?

3. From which NELAP approved accrediting authority will this laboratory seek its primary accreditation?

4. From which NELAP approved accrediting authority will this laboratory seek secondary accreditation?

5. What percent of this laboratory's clients will require the laboratory to be accredited by NELAP?

_____ %

Please return form to: Jerry Parr
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